

BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY, 1919-39

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recognized free entry into the Mediterranean, transit and exit, to be a vital interest of both parties and their interests as in no way inconsistent. Both disclaimed any desire to modify the *status quo*, and Italy promised not to retain the Balearic Isles, which she had occupied for the purpose of the Spanish war. It was merely a scrap of paper, for the Italian press and wireless soon resumed their attacks on England, and the increasing support of Franco made nonsense of the pretence of neutrality. The substitution of Neville Chamberlain for Mr. Baldwin in June 1937 was followed by a more vigorous drive for peace. Filled with anxiety by the drift towards war, and undeterred by his inexperience of diplomacy, he took over control of foreign affairs. On June 25 he uttered an earnest appeal to those who held responsible positions at home and abroad to weigh their words. "I have read that in the high mountains there are sometimes conditions to be found when an incautious move or even a sudden exclamation may start an avalanche. That is just the condition in which we find ourselves to-day/*

Believing that little could be done at Berlin, at any rate for the moment, the new Prime Minister strove earnestly for appeasement in Rome. A friendly message from Mussolini through Count Grandi evoked by a speech of Mr. Eden on July 19 led Chamberlain to write a personal letter in cordial terms, regretting that relations were still far from the old feeling of confidence and affection, but expressing the belief that they could be restored if misunderstandings and unfounded suspicions were removed. We were ready for conversations at any time. The Duce replied that he too wished to restore good relations and was ready for discussions. We replied that we hoped they might begin in September,

but the sky
darkened once again. Italian intervention in
Spain was naked
and unashamed. Italy boycotted the conference
at Nyon.
Difficulties in the Non-Intervention Committee
concerning the
withdrawal of volunteers postponed the opening
of discussions.
Italy's withdrawal from the League, her
adherence to the
German-Japanese anti-Comintern pact, and the
Duce's visit
to Berlin in September illustrated the new
orientation. The
situation, declared Chamberlain, had seriously
and steadily
deteriorated since the exchange of letters in
July. The Italian
wireless and press revelled in vituperation, and
the garrison
in Libya was reinforced. It was clear that no
progress could
be made so long as recognition of the new Italian
Empire was